

ON THE BACKBURNER:
AN ANALYSIS
OF DOCUMENTARY STYLES THROUGH AN ANTHOLOGICAL
CULINARY DOCUSERIES

A CREATIVE PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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BY

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With the arrival of streaming content platforms, such as Netflix, Hulu and Amazon, an increasingly significant number of new fictional and non-fictional programs are being offered to audiences. Within this novel abundance of content, audiences can find many new documentaries (as well as “docuseries”). The increase in documentaries as a percentage of all new content on streaming platforms is a response to the documentary’s popularity among the average viewer (HotDocs, 2018). For instance, some of the most popular documentaries series recently debuting on streaming services include *Making A Murderer* (Ricciardi, Demos, Nishimura, & Deo, 2015), *Blackfish* (Cowperthwaite & Oteyza, 2013), *Fyre* (Smith, Purzycki, & Gabai, 2019), *Explained* (Klein, Rozansky, Mumm, Nishimura. Posner, Spingarn-Koff, & Townsend, 2018), and *Tiger King: Murder, Mayhen and Madness* (Chaiklin, Goode, Smith, & Stevens, 2020). These are only a few in the ever-increasing list of popular documentaries and docuseries appearing on streaming services. Among these popular films and series are several culinary documentaries, including *Chef’s Table* (Gelb, Fried, McGinn, & Weaver, 2016), *Salt Fat Acid Heat* (Cotner, Gibney, Lawrence, Nishimura, Nosrat, Offman, Suh, & Biraghi, 2018), and *Ugly Delicious* (Cotner & Del Deo, 2018).

The interest in culinary docuseries has been substantial, so much so that in July of 2019, Netflix debuted its very own “Netflix Food” category and corresponding Twitter account (@NetflixFood), which advertises the streaming platform’s food programs. Each one of these culinary docuseries has a distinct visual style and way of storytelling, which makes each of them just as unique and entertaining as the other. Despite the rising interest in documentaries, especially culinary documentaries, the general public lacks knowledge about the documentary

format. On a more immediate level, I found that during my time as an undergraduate, many of peers who made documentaries typically stayed within the constraints of a single style. Every documentary that I worked on as an undergraduate followed the same formula. None of the films really strayed from this formula or experimented in the slightest with different methods of storytelling commonly found in documentary. I do not necessarily find this to be a bad thing, I simply believe it is attributed to most undergraduate production programs focusing on narrative film and its structures and not documentary styles. From my perspective, because of the lack of documentary training in my undergraduate and graduate education, I feel many students feel less excited about being a part of a documentary team. In other words, they do not value the experience in the same way as they do when working on a traditional, fictional narrative film production. Narrative fictional film is often seen as more creative, which is essentially true; however, with documentaries, students are not typically aware documentary storytelling can happen in several different ways, or modes.

A documentary mode is a concept that attempts to distinguish traits and aesthetic conventions in documentary film (Nichols, 2001). Bill Nichols, a documentary theorist, developed the characteristics for six different documentary modes. He identified these modes as Poetic, Expository, Participatory, Observational, Reflexive, and Performative (Nichols, 2001). Toni de Bromhead, another documentary theorist, argues a different approach to documentary filmmaking. While Nichols takes a rather journalistic approach, De Bromhead approaches documentary from a cinematic perspective and stresses the emotional impact that documentaries should leave (de Bromhead, 1996). Respectively, de Bromhead presented her own modes of documentary, including Linear, Discursive, Episodic, Poetic, and Hybrid modes (de Bromhead, 1996). As we shall see, the different modes allow for creative expression and diversified

storytelling techniques, going above and beyond what many people consider with documentary filmmaking.

To explore these modes further, my creative project seeks primarily to understand how the mode of a documentary can influence an audience's perception of information and story. For the sake of clarity, I decided to just focus on the exploration of four modes as defined by Bill Nichols: Observational, Participatory, Expository, and Poetic. In my view, these modes are ideal structures to allow me to compare and contrast information in a way that makes logical sense to the view. In addition, the modes allow me to work under the same overarching themes and general content so that I may explore how the modes' styles influence perception.

There were several reasons behind why I decided to leave out the Reflexive and Performative modes, and only take on the four. First and foremost, as a beginner in documentary filmmaking, I felt that six was a daunting number to try to produce. If I had a more solid crew and access to at least one other restaurant, it would have probably been more feasible to take on all six- despite that still being nearly 30 minutes of content that I would have needed to make for this project. I also did not find the Reflexive and Performative modes entirely necessary to this project. This is because in the Performative mode, the filmmaker plays a part in telling the story, which I felt that I already had explored in the Participatory documentary, *Plating Passion*. I also found that the addition of a documentary utilizing the Reflexive mode would have not strongly benefitted this project, as the Reflexive mode primarily focuses on the filmmakers producing the documentary itself. It is my belief that featuring a Reflexive documentary would have disrupted the objective that each documentary would have the same story- especially because my intention was to have the story told by chefs and restaurant owners (and not myself, as the filmmaker).

Because of my own personal interest, as well as the increasing societal interest in culinary documentaries, the subject of my documentaries centers around food culture. To coincide with the four modes, I made four short documentaries; each one reflects one of Nichols' four modes (Observational, Participatory, Expository, and Poetic). The setting of these documentaries takes place at two very well-known restaurants in Muncie and the surrounding area, Vera Mae's Bistro in downtown Muncie and Payne's Restaurant in Gas City. Despite there being eleven modes, including the five modes identified by Toni de Bromhead, after careful review I have found that Nichols' modes better suit what is often found in traditional culinary documentaries. de Bromhead's modes, while offering promising methods of storytelling, are specifically structured in a way that does not suit them well to culinary documentaries.

I find this topic worthy of research primarily for the education of those who are in an undergraduate production program. Because of the lack of documentary curriculum at Ball State, I educated myself about these different modes. I discovered that I love this style of filmmaking and, with the new knowledge of the varying ways in which I can tell these stories, I fell in love with documentary filmmaking. Furthermore, understanding that these different modes exist was pivotal for discovering this new interest, which was something I never experienced in my undergraduate studies. Given the growth in documentary production on streaming platforms, I think it is important for students who are pursuing a career in video production to have a thorough understanding of documentary filmmaking, at least as much as they do with traditional fictional narrative storytelling. I also think this topic is worthy of research because it is valuable for those who want to make documentaries to learn about the different modes in practice, so that they could potentially gain the ability to decide which mode of documentary may allow them to tell their story best.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As this project represents my first attempt at directing and producing my own documentaries, I have concluded quite a bit of research on documentary filmmaking. This research largely comprises of Bill Nichols' *Introduction to Documentary* (2001). The biggest part of the conception of this project was understanding what the different modes are and understanding how stories are told within specific modes. The most self-explanatory modes in my opinions were the Observational and Participatory modes. I had never heard of a poetic documentary prior to my research. According to Nichols, the Poetic mode "sacrifices the conventions of continuity editing and the sense of a very specific location in time and place that follows from it to explore associations and patterns that involve temporal rhythm and spatial juxtaposition." I had difficulty understanding what this would look like onscreen until I watched *Samsara* (Magidson, 2012), a rather strikingly beautiful documentary, which I have used to base my poetic documentary.

I also wanted to understand how Toni de Bromhead's modes differentiate from Nichols'. I found it extremely difficult to find de Bromhead's book *Looking Two Ways* (1996), so I had to resort to a secondary source in order to properly understand her modes. In *Documentaries: The Different Types* (McAnaney, 2016), the author lists de Bromhead's five modes and explains how each one would be structured. This source was vital in deciding to use Nichols' modes against de Bromhead's. The one mode that both Nichols and de Bromhead recognize is the Poetic mode, but de Bromhead's other modes seem rather complicated, and do not best suit a culinary documentary. According to this source, de Bromhead's documentary modes follow a much more cinematic way of storytelling; which include documentary structures such as "the road movie"

and Hollywood storytelling (the three-act structure model). The modes that she refined also appear to be slightly too specific, in that certain types of story would very easily utilize her modes, i.e. political, true crime, and band documentaries, but not necessarily for the story about culinary culture that I intend to tell.

Natusch and Hawkins (2014) hypothesized that while Nichols' modes describe the predominant mode within a documentary, a representation for each one of his six modes can still be found in a documentary. The authors broke down each scene of two documentaries and categorized these scenes into different subcategories of each mode. They conclude with claiming that interpreting each one of Nichols' mode into a documentary on a micro level "provides an equally effective approach to analyzing hybrid documentary film" (Natusch & Hawkins, 2014). While my intention is to create four documentaries that fall under one general mode, it is important to note that perhaps utilizing more than just one mode in a film could be just as effective in terms of storytelling.

Nosal, Keenan, Hastings, & Gneezy (2016) explored the idea of changing the background music in documentaries featuring sharks to see how it affected audience's perceptions of sharks. They found that when video clips displayed sharks swimming with ominous background music, the audience found the sharks threatening; but when the music was changed to something more serene, audiences did not feel threatened. This particular article's strengths are its ability to stay objective to the subject matter. It even discussed musical changes in different situations, for example when wine tasters were listening to a certain type of music, they described the wine in one way, and when the music changed, they described it completely differently. My intention with this project is similar, in that I am changing different auditory and visual components to see if the audience reacts or perceives information one way or another.

Eitzen's (1995) *When Is a Documentary?* very much challenges what a documentary actually is. The piece identifies them as films that beg the question, "might this be lying?" identifying them as films that beg the question "might this be lying?" The author includes conversation about Bill Nichols' book *Representing Reality* (2001), as well as other discussion of what actually constitutes reality/actuality, and how much of a role truth actually plays in documentaries. It claims that documentaries are a "creative treatment of reality," while questioning what truly makes a documentary a documentary, and why non-fiction (narrative) films aren't considered documentary under the above definition. The strength of this piece is the fact that it challenges the reader's understanding of documentary, though at times slightly difficult to read. This piece, in my opinion, is just as helpful to my research as it is non-helpful- in creating my documentaries, according to this article, I can truly make the documentary what I wish and do not need to follow a certain formula.

In addition to doing research on constructing documentary films and learning about the different modes and ways of styling, I have also been spending quite a bit of time research food culture itself. I have always been a fan of culinary docuseries, such as *Anthony Bourdain's Parts Unknown* (Tenaglia, Oppenheimer, & Bourdain, 2013) as well as *Ugly Delicious* (Cotner & Deo, 2018), and *The Chef Show* (Choi, Favreau, & Johnson, 2019), so I have been immersing myself into those series to get an idea of styling and typical culinary documentary conventions.

Eagan's *Towering Cuisine* (2017) features interviews with Anthony Bourdain about his own opinion about television programs featuring food. It discusses his dislike for standard culinary shows now, comparing certain shows to "making porn." This article is very well done in explaining how Bourdain dislikes shots of food crafted to make people hungry; he thinks that instead of showing an image of someone eating a juicy cheeseburger, and it had a story behind it

(i.e. a “rags-to-riches” story, or one like *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (Iwashina & Pellegrini, 2012), where the cheeseburger is a result of years of perfecting), it is much more effective and impactful to an audience than simple food porn. This was a very valuable read for how I plan to shape the aesthetic and story choices; because my intention with this project is to craft stories about the connections that food creates, avoiding shots that illicit a hunger reaction out of my audience as opposed to an emotional reaction is something I will try to do.

Beigelman (2016) explains how cooking documentaries such as the critically acclaimed *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (Iwashina & Pellegrini, 2012) as well as Netflix’s series *Cooked* are not simply about food, they are about the philosophies of life. The author describes that while *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (Iwashina & Pellegrini, 2012) is paired with stunning shots of sushi and other Japanese foods designed to make the viewer’s mouth water, it is the chef, Jiro, and his drive towards perfection and to be the best that really lend to the story of this documentary. The author continues on with discussing Anthony Bourdain’s series including *Parts Unknown* and *No Reservations* (Collins & Tengalia, 2005), which feature Bourdain cursing and sarcastically discussing food- but essentially, Bourdain’s message to viewers throughout the series is to not be afraid of other cultures. This article does a fantastic job in offering a wide variety of culinary documentaries and tying them together with the same string. It discusses *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (Iwashina & Pellegrini, 2012), a profoundly intelligent and deeply moving documentary; and then discusses Anthony Bourdain- who was a very rugged, almost aggressive chef. While they may be on opposite ends of each other in terms of style and content, all of these documentaries offer profound food and life philosophies. I find this research incredibly helpful because in my own mini-documentaries for my project, I want to focus more on the culture of food and the

relationships that may form from enjoying a type of cuisine- instead of focusing on how a certain dish is actually made or may taste.

In Tomaselli's and Shepperson's *Documentary Film, Visual Anthropology, and Visual Sociology* (1997), it analyzes the ethics of ethnographic filmmaking, as well as the practice of utilizing visual anthropology and the "discourse of Othering." This concept, "othering," is one that I am not familiar with and was not expanded upon in detail in this article, which at times made it difficult to read and understand. The article also offers many examples of documentary films that focus on ethnography and other cultures and examines two documentaries released on the same subject matter, but structured in very different ways.

This article is a very useful tool for looking at more culturally oriented documentaries in an academic sense. It does well with applying theories such as structuralism and semiotics to the subject of ethnographic documentary filmmaking. I think the most useful information from this source to me will be regarding module 4, the section about "visual anthropology"- it details semiotics in documentaries *about* cultures vs. films *of* cultures.

With this review of literature, I believe the project will help aid the very limited research on how documentary modes may influence information or the story of a documentary film. I also believe it will help aid the limited research available regarding an academic approach to creating culinary documentaries. My hope is that this project will open the conversation for students to explore utilizing these different modes in their own documentary projects.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Knowing that the documentaries have increased with popularity due to streaming platforms, I decided the best way to explore how different documentary modes shape information is by creating multiple short documentaries—each falling within a chosen mode—and attempt to tell the same story in each film. With the birth of Netflix Food only approximately ten months ago, I found it easier to access and track the release of culinary docuseries on the streaming platforms, which allowed me to easily study how documentary series utilize different modes and forms of storytelling.

My biggest challenge with beginning the creation and pre-production process of this project was that I had never created my own documentary before. I have helped produce several documentaries in both my undergraduate and graduate career, however I had never been at the creative helm of one. My research first began by asking my peers who have had documentary directing experience about their process for story development. On top of that, I began researching and reading all about the documentary-making process, which helped supplement the information regarding the different types of documentaries that my peers did not have experience with, for instance, the observational and poetic modes.

From the very beginning, I knew that I wanted the focus of my documentaries to be about culinary culture. In other words, I am significantly interested in food documentaries as a path for my creative and professional career going forward.

Several of my own personal favorite culinary docuseries such as *Ugly Delicious* (Cotner & Del Deo, 2018) and Anthony Bourdain's series focus more on the cultural impacts that food has on communities as opposed to how certain types of dishes might be made, as seen in *The*

Chef Show (Choi, Favreau, & Johnson. 2019). Making culinary documentary content that touches on issues such as cultures experience food is another career aspiration of mine- that being said, I applied this form of food storytelling to my docuseries, which I have named *On the Backburner*. I watched these shows in attempts to get an understanding of how filmmakers approach discussing food on a deeper level. After some notetaking and observation, I applied these common themes to how I approached the aesthetics and the storytelling of these documentaries, primarily the Expository and Participatory films.

With each documentary, I wanted to choose a restaurant that was not a chain and that had a standard of excellence with their food. My initial idea for each documentary was to select a different restaurant that fit the aesthetics and mood that I had planned for each documentary mode. With the assistance of my chair, I created a list of several notable Muncie and Indianapolis-area restaurants that could be featured within this project. The list included Vera Mae's Bistro, Payne's Restaurant, The Neely House, Iozzo's Garden of Italy, and Bonge's Tavern. I started with my top four restaurants, which were Vera Mae's, Payne's, Iozzo's, and Bonge's. However, after having trouble with contacting and arranging pre-interviews with Iozzo's and Bonge's, I moved on to contacting The Neely House, which also ended up not working out. With Vera Mae's and Payne's on board, and being surprisingly very easy to work with, I decided to only feature those two restaurants in my documentaries. Each establishment would be the subject of two different documentaries, or two modes for each restaurant.

Aesthetic Considerations in the Methodology

When determining the looks for each of the documentaries, I pulled inspiration from documentaries such as *Ugly Delicious* (Cotner & Del Deo, 2018), an extremely unique documentary series that changes its aesthetics in nearly every single episode. For my Expository

documentary, *Food for Thought*, I found that the best way for the featured subjects to attempt a connection with the audience was through directly addressing the camera, hence the framing that can be viewed in **Appendix 1**. I decided to use Vera Mae's for this film because the interior of the restaurant is more aesthetically pleasing than Payne's, which is also why I decided to use Vera Mae's for the Poetic mode documentary. There was also a greater variety of people to interview in the Vera Mae's staff, and they were slightly more excited about the project and willing to cooperate than my contact at Payne's.

For the Participatory documentary, *Plating Passion*, I originally wanted a more handheld interview look that can be seen in Anthony Bourdain's series, but because that would mean my camera operators would have to be holding the camera upwards of half an hour, I did not want to put them through that strenuous work since I was not paying them. We decided to shoot our interview in a booth with two over-the-shoulder angles and one wide. This was done in order to cut back and forth in the edit to enhance the conversation aspect of the Participatory mode. Though some documentaries that fall within the Participatory mode do not always incorporate the filmmaker and the subject having an on-screen discussion, I wanted to include this in my film in order to further set apart the aesthetics from *Food for Thought*. I decided to use Payne's as the setting in my Participatory documentary because my interview subject was a little more talkative than some of the subjects at Vera Mae's. I also found that, because he is from Great Britain, having a conversation with him has the potential of being slightly more interesting because of our cultural differences.

I had no specific aesthetics in mind for the Observational documentary, *Where the Food is Made*. This is because the focus of Observational documentaries is not on the aesthetics, rather the subjects that are being observed. Because the purpose behind Observational documentary

making is to interfere as little as possible, I refused to stage or set up any b-roll footage. Instead, I asked my director of photography, Jacob Guenin, to stay out of the way as much as possible and simply capture footage of the kitchen staff working in their environment. I chose to use Payne's for the Observational documentary because the size of their kitchen was significantly larger than Vera Mae's, and they were incredibly flexible and open to us being anywhere in the kitchen.

I struggled most with the aesthetics for *Terrine*, my Poetic documentary. This was so because Poetic documentaries are largely abstract and typically have strikingly beautiful b-roll. It was much easier to get visually pleasing shots of the Vera Mae's dining room, but it was nearly impossible in the kitchen. In the edit, I utilized the Kuleshov Effect—a form of montage—by the suggestion of my chair, which helped me structure my documentary.

Technical Choices

The most vital piece of equipment that was utilized in the production of these documentaries was the camera we decided to film on. The camera that we used is the Canon C300, which, of the camera offered to use by Ball State University Media Services, is best for documentary work, as it is lightweight and there is little assembly that goes into setting up the camera. I decided to use this camera because of the ease of use, knowing that myself and my crew would be having several “run-and-gun” sort of shoots, especially for b-roll. Without the use of this camera, it is likely that that my crew would have not been able to obtain the footage from the kitchens, which was an absolute necessity.

The other vital piece of equipment that I brought to every b-roll shoot was the Canon CN-E 18-30 lens. This compact zoom lens was extremely beneficial in obtaining kitchen b-roll, because my Jacob was able to pull focus (the act of focusing on different items in a shot), change

the aperture (opening the lens's shutter to make an image darker or brighter), but primarily, zoom in and out easily- without having the need to change lenses. I was also very pleased to have been able to use it for this project because though it is a compact zoom lens, it is part of Canon's Cinema Lens lineup, so the quality of the footage that we obtained was beautiful.

My director of photography and I decided to utilize several different image resolutions during production. For *Food for Thought*, I wanted to do a center-frame interview set-up with my subjects because I felt it was most impactful for connecting with an audience. We decided to film these interviews in the 4K (3840p x 2160p) resolution, because it is the highest resolution the Canon C300 allows for, and I wanted to be able to scale the interview shots up slightly to fake a second camera angle. You can find more discussion regarding this in the chapter below, under Post-Production. With Stephen's interview, we also decided to shoot in 4K, though it did not plan to do much (if any) rescaling in post-production. I wanted the interviews to look crisper than the b-roll, so while shooting Stephen's interview in 4K was not completely necessary, it was more of an aesthetic choice. Lastly, we decided to shoot the b-roll in the 2K (2048p x 1080p) resolution, because I wanted it to look crisper than Full High Definition (1920p x 1080p). We also decided to shoot in 2K because shooting in this high resolution allowed me to have a little bit of room to make adjustments to the shot in post-production, but not nearly as much as 4K footage. We also found that with the substantial amount of b-roll that we obtained throughout the entire production process, 2K footage was much more manageable than having hours' worth and hundreds of gigabits worth of 4K b-roll footage.

As framing goes, there were some very deliberate choices made, especially in *Food for Thought* and *Terrine*. Framing my interview subjects in the center in *Food for Thought* and asking them to speak directly into the camera was a choice that I felt aided the Expository mode

well. As stated above, Jacob and I decided this framing would be best in order to connect with the audience. I have also seen this framing utilized in other documentaries such as *Ugly Delicious* (Cotner & Del Deo, 2018) and *Fyre* (Gabai, Purzycki, & Smith, 2019), and was interested in exploring for this project; largely as an educational tool to encourage student filmmakers to experiment with different interview framing styles.

Stephen's interview on the other hand, just consisted of a simple two-shot (framing where two people are featured in the shot) and over-the-shoulder shots. These framing conventions were the best options for filming our conversation. The framing choices were also incredibly beneficial because I had multiple angles to utilize in post-production. For example, if Stephen was talking but I needed to make a visual edit, I could cut away to either the wide shot of the two of us or to the shot of me listening to cover the edit. Because most of the documentary is just one conversation, being able to cut away to different angles, in a way, makes up for my choice to not include an overwhelming amount of b-roll, thus allowing the viewer to have various images to look at during this conversation.

I utilized establishing shots largely in *Plating Passion*, to give the viewer a sense of the space in the restaurant, and to visually establish that British culture featured in the documentary. I added this sequence of establishing shots also because in many documentary series, especially Anthony Bourdain's shows, there are several shots accompanied by music to allow the audience to gather context clues on the space and culture that is being explored. I utilized an establishing shot very briefly in *Where the Food is Made*, when Jacob was walking through the kitchen and then panned around to the rest of the kitchen. Using this shot was to, again, give the viewer a sense of the space they will be in for the next several minutes.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION OF THE PROJECT

Story Summary

My intention for these documentaries was for them to have the same basic themes and somewhat similar storyline. I knew going in this would be difficult to convey, because two of the documentaries would have no interviews to carry the story. The meaning and story of these two modes would stem from what the viewer perceived of it. When crafting each of these films, my intention with the story was to express how food, by nature, has an effect on people because of the ways it brings together family, friends, and communities by- in a more simplified way of saying- breaking bread together. The biggest takeaway I want people to have from *each* documentary is that food is integral to life because of the way it has an impact on every person, regardless of how deep that impact may be.

Pre-Production

In order to properly prepare and ensure that my documentaries would be successful in carrying the story and their own styles, I began pre-production very early on in the Summer 2019 semester. This process included obtaining the help of my advisor to form a list of restaurants that I was interested in featuring in these documentaries. After narrowing down the most feasible restaurants, I selected a friend of mine, Garrett Looker, to produce this project, so that we could begin contacting the different restaurants.

My pre-production process also included doing quite a bit of research on creating documentaries, especially short form. Perhaps the most important research that I conducted in this process was learning about what all of the documentary modes are, as well as examples of each and how they are differentiated from one another. I did this mainly by reading books from

documentary theorists, and well as watching several different documentaries that fell within the modes I was most interested in utilizing. I even watched the mockumentary series *Documentary Now!* (Armisen, Hader, Meyers, & Thomas, 2015) to better understand how a single series plays with styling conventions from episode to episode. My viewing of *Ugly Delicious* (Cotner & Del Deo, 2018) also served this purpose, as well as helping me understand how to tell stories about food culture.

The next step in my pre-production process was deciding what the story for the documentaries would be. I slightly struggled with this because I had never had any documentary directing experience. I therefore turned to my producer, Garrett, and another friend of mine, Eddie Metzger for guidance. Eddie quickly became my story producer for the project. Thankfully, he also enjoys viewing culinary documentaries, so he helped me write the questions and even took on the role as my interviewer for *Food for Thought*. Because I was adamant about the story of each documentary being the same, we attempted to write questions that were rather generic and not specific to each of the restaurants, but still allowed for room to add personal insight and follow-up questions. The list of questions we compiled for the interview portions of the documentaries can be found in **Appendix 2**.

Lastly, the final step for my pre-production process was selecting the restaurants we wanted to feature—Vera Mae’s Bistro and Payne’s Restaurant—and conduct site surveys and pre-interviews. I wanted to ensure to visit these two restaurants before shooting so I could get an idea of the space of where we could shoot the interviews, the size of the kitchens, as well as the lighting conditions throughout the spaces. For Vera Mae’s, I wanted the interview framing to be intentional and aesthetically pleasing, so Jacob decided it would be best to take a photo of how we planned on framing the interview. We would later find that to be a benefit on set, as it served

as a reference photo for how the camera and lighting should look when setting up the on-camera interview (**Appendix 3**). While doing these site surveys, I also meet with the restaurant owners and chefs in order to get a sense of their personalities and to establish a face-to-face relationship with them. I wanted to ensure that we had a positive relationship so that they could feel at ease during their interviews.

Production

The production process for this project consisted of two principle photography shooting days with one pickup shoot. The call sheets for each shoot can be found in **Appendix 4**. Shooting at Vera Mae's was our first shoot, which started out well and then blind-sided me a bit. We were originally scheduled to get two interviews, one with Kent Schuff, who is one of the co-owners of Vera Mae's, and then with Cameron Bevan, the executive chef of the restaurant. Following the interviews, we were scheduled to obtain b-roll for a couple hours, as it was vital to get high quality b-roll. I also had a full crew for this day, so I wanted to be able to utilize everyone's skill set and allow them creative freedom and input on certain shots. However, when my crew and I arrived at the restaurant and began setting up the interview, the owner asked us to interview the other co-owner, Steve Fennimore; and the executive chef asked us to interview the sous chef, Matt Trunk. This was an absolute curveball in my plan, as I had only mentally prepared for two interviews, but we would now be getting four. We agreed, but because I had not previously met the other co-owner or the sous chef, I did not know what to expect.

Following the four interviews, I was emotionally exhausted and felt that I could no longer direct at my full potential. Jacob insisted that we get some b-roll, which we did; but not nearly the amount I had planned for. In the following weeks, Jacob and I went to Vera Mae's during the dinner hour in order to get some b-roll of the kitchen staff preparing food, as well as some guests

eating. This shoot also went well as we got plenty of b-roll, however we found shooting in the kitchen was rather difficult because of all of the fast-moving parts and the small size of the kitchen. We found that filming in the dining room was slightly easier because there was more space, however because of the lack of sufficient lighting in the dining room, the only lighting we were able to utilize was the mood lighting on the tables- so the b-roll looks rather dim. Nevertheless, it does nicely encapsulate the mood and tone that the restaurant attempts to uphold.

We had one shooting day at Payne's Restaurant, doing so with a much smaller crew. The schedule on this day consisted of getting one interview with the owner and head cook, Stephen Payne, and then capturing an abundance of b-roll afterward. Our plan was to begin shooting around eight o'clock, because the restaurant opened at ten o'clock, so we wanted to ensure that we had plenty of time to get set up. It was also in my plan to have a meal prepared for the two of us so that we could have our conversation with a meal, which is often seen in a lot of culinary documentaries, such as Anthony Bourdain's series. However, we experienced another curveball. Our interview subject showed up late, so we were not able to get into the building or start setting up when we originally scheduled. After many, many calls from my producer to our subject, he finally showed up nearly an hour and a half late. My crew did a phenomenal job with setting up swiftly, and quickly thereafter we began to roll. We did not have a prepared meal like I had hoped, however the interview still went well. Our subject left after the interview, but allowed us free reign of the restaurant to shoot whatever b-roll we wanted. We spent nearly an hour and a half capturing b-roll in the kitchen, which ended up working very well for the Observational documentary (*Where the Food is Made*).

Post-Production

The post-production process for this project seemed daunting at first, for I knew that I would be the sole editor for all four documentaries. Given that I had never edited anything of this magnitude, let alone a documentary, I was not quite sure what to expect. I decided the best place to start was to begin watching several of the documentaries series that I had watched at the very beginning of this process, but this time I focused on the editing.

I started the process by going through all of the interviews from both Payne's and Vera Mae's and marked the best soundbites. During the logging process for the four interviews from Vera Mae's, I found that the two best interviews given were from Kent and Cam, the original two subjects I had planned to interview. I found the answers that the other co-owner and the sous chef gave did not quite fit the tone of the Expository documentary (*Food for Thought*), so I opted to avoid using them for this project unless there was a small soundbite that they could offer to the story. During the production process for these interviews, because I had planned on using center-framing for the subject, I shot the interviews in 3840 x 2160 resolution so that I could easily punch into the shot in post-production to give the effect of having a second camera angle. I utilized this "punched-in" (a secondary shot that is scaled up in size, mimicking a different camera angle) effect during notable soundbites in order to emphasize emotion and the story being told by the subjects.

Breakdown of Modes

As I assumed from the very beginning of this project, each of these four documentaries has a distinct style and way of storytelling, which is something I was slightly worried about in the production phase of these documentaries. While I'm pleased that each film has a different

style than the next, I do not necessarily believe that each mode worked for culinary documentaries.

As a standalone documentary, I believe *Where the Food is Made*, the Observational film, worked the best as a culinary documentary. I also believe this film did the best in terms to reflecting what mode the film was emulating. There was truly no interference between my director of photography and the subjects he was filming, which is exactly the objective of Observational films. However, I do find that it fell short in telling the story I was intending to tell. While we see the kitchen staff preparing meals and putting them on the table in front of the restaurant guests, I do not think the message of “food being integral to our survival,” which is seen in the other documentaries, is clear. Though I believe this film is the strongest as a standalone and culinary documentary, it is not the strongest in terms of the story I was attempting to tell.

I believe the weakest of the documentaries to be *Terrine*, the Poetic film. Personally, I find it hard to say what actually worked well within this documentary; however, I think it does a fairly decent job in replicating the abstractness and bizarre form of storytelling that Poetic documentaries tend to have. Poetic documentaries typically stress mood and tone (Nichols, 2001, p. 103), which is very much what I attempted to emulate with *Terrine*. I find that this documentary falls short in carrying the message of the importance of food culture. In some way, I find its message to be rather similar to *Where the Food is Made*, which I believe highlights the effort of kitchen staff in preparing and sharing food with communities of people. I believe it also fell short in some of its visuals, because of my inability to obtain highly cinematic, intentional b-roll that many Poetic documentaries have. There are some conventions that are found in Poetic documentaries that I feel I was able to pull off, primarily visual and aural juxtaposition. I think

the music paired with the kitchen b-roll shots especially feature juxtaposition, because the music is rather delightful, and the kitchen b-roll seems slightly unpolished.

The Expository documentary, *Food for Thought*, turned out incredibly well in terms of telling my intended story. I believe this is largely attributed to Chef Cam, who is the primary figure in the documentary, because of his true and raw passion of the subject of food. Chef Cam delivered the best interview out of the entire project by far. While the other subjects had some decent soundbites, Chef Cam was truly the key to this Expository documentary. I think it would have worked better if I had chosen to include more specific anecdotes in order to enhance the story, however, it was my intention for this documentary's story to resemble the other documentaries as closely as possible. As I've stated earlier, I think some of the b-roll is slightly dissatisfying in terms of the aesthetics and amount of sequences, but I still think it works in aiding the story. The biggest component that is lacking in this documentary is the presence of a voiceover, which I was unfortunately not able to obtain in a timely enough manner before Ball State's campus was shut down (full explanation in Limitations section). While I do not think the documentary struggles because of this oversight, having a voiceover would have allowed this documentary to more closely reflect what an Expository documentary is.

I find that my final documentary, *Plating Passion*, does well as a Performative documentary because it contains myself, the filmmaker and "researcher" (Nichols, 2001, p. 115), interacting with the subject. I think the story does a fair job at paralleling *Food for Thought's* story, which was my original intention with this project. Where this documentary struggles is in the collaboration between myself and my subject, Stephen. Participatory documentaries highlight the filmmaker's importance in the film and prompts the audience to question "how the filmmaker and social actor respond to each other" (Nichols, 2001, p. 116). Although I was present and seen

on-screen, I do not find that my role in being present was necessarily important. I believe this is primarily because Stephen was rather difficult to interview. He tended to ramble on and on, with very little opportunity for me to politely interrupt and chime into the conversation. There were some instances where I asked rather simple questions, and I could not really get a straightforward answer. So, much of my “participation” was through active listening and chiming in at the end of one of his tangents. In addition, I think this documentary slightly suffers in the contents of its b-roll, because we were unable to obtain any b-roll of Steven because of his hasty exit from the interview.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Limitations

One of the largest limitations I experienced during the pre-production and production process was not having a substantial budget. Because of my own personal financial situation, I was not able to pay any of the locations or interview subjects that were featured in my documentaries. It is my belief that if I had given them some sort of payment, all of them were likely to cooperate more than they had. While all of my subjects at both Vera Mae's and Payne's were cooperative, I believe having a monetary incentive may have helped with the quality of the project. For example, if I had the budget to offer Vera Mae's some form of compensation, I would have been more likely to have had the kitchen shut down for my crew so that we could set up more complicated, yet more visually appealing shots. I would have loved to have been able to do an overhead shot of the food preparation station (example seen in **Appendix 5**) to include in the footage for the Poetic documentary. I also thinking having a substantial budget for this project would have allowed me to gain entry into some of the other restaurants that I was hoping to feature in my documentaries, which would offer more variety of content and visuals.

Perhaps my largest limitation besides budget was being a beginner in documentary filmmaking. Though I have read many books and articles on the subject of documentary filmmaking and the culture of cuisine, not having the experience of creating a documentary in the past was a major setback. The workflow and editing of documentaries is much different than narrative film, which I have plenty of experience in. Because culinary documentary film is a field that I hope to pursue as my career, I believe I had very high expectations for these films, that of which I did not reach. Not only am I a beginner in documentary film directing, I decided

to edit all four of these in hopes to gain some experience in documentary editing, because I have none. I believe this was another limitation that I found in this process, because I feel that if I had chosen an actual editor with documentary experience, I would have been able to direct the post process a little bit better.

There are other areas where I was limited by my abilities, largely of which fell in post-production. If I had to time to learn different motion graphics and design elements, I would have loved to make fun title sequences and other graphics to further explore the mode. I also don't know too much about coloring, so I wasn't able to explore different color styles within the modes. Instead, most of the "exploration" of title design I attempted was through font choices, and I found myself coloring the documentaries with the usage of basic color correction and with the help of my director of photography, Jacob.

There were a few technical limitations during production, the biggest one was not being able to obtain clean kitchen audio and natural sound for the b-roll. A friend of mine who handled all of the field audio, Eric Heinzman, attempted to construct a rig with a lavalier microphone and a boom pole, as a shotgun microphone was too obstructive in the cramped kitchens. He taped this much smaller microphone to a pole and ran the wire up the pole in order to connect it to his audio recorder. The intention was to hold the end of the pole and stick the microphone in the area of the subject that Jacob was shooting. However, we found that this was still too obtrusive, and our best bet was to just send Jacob into the kitchen to record the footage and in-camera audio.

Another limitation that interfered with technical aspects was, unfortunately enough, the outbreak of COVID-19. A little over a month ago, when I had sent the fine cuts of my documentaries to my advisor, he suggested that I could include a voiceover in *Food for Thought*, as voiceovers are typically featured in Expository documentaries. By the time I had received this

feedback and was preparing to implement this change, I was unable to record a voiceover. This is because I do not have my own microphone to record quality audio, and I was also unable to access the technology on Ball State's campus because of the shutdown.

The final limitation that I encountered was, strangely enough, the proposed project itself. I thought I would be able to tell the same story across four different films; however, I have found through more thorough research and my own conclusions that documentary modes affect story. Because my intention going into the interviews was to keep the subjects talking about a specific, rather vague subject, I believe the documentaries are not as strong as they would have been if I had asked or included rather specific details about each chef or restaurant. While I some of the documentaries (*Food for Thought* and *Plating Passion*) are effective in telling a shared story of how food is integral to humankind, I find them to be weaker documentaries when they stand alone. In simpler terms, I find that the way I went about the project is what kept these documentaries from telling truly great stories.

Conclusion

From the beginning of this project's conception, I knew it would challenge my skillset. In addition to my own personal challenges, I hoped that this project would challenge students who were interested in making documentaries. As I've stated, I have found that the majority of my peers in the same undergraduate and now graduate programs that I was a part of have little knowledge of documentary modes. Not only was it a personal goal of mine to create a series of wildly different culinary documentaries, but I also wanted to explore the idea that way a story and content was framed would change depending on the documentary mode.

I found that for culinary documentaries, the strongest mode that allows the filmmaker to explore a story is the Participatory mode; which is why I believe so many culinary documentary

series such as *Ugly Delicious* (Cotner & Del Deo, 2018) and both of Bourdain's series feature the filmmakers interacting with their subject(s), and having that on-screen discussion. This mode, especially when featuring both the filmmaker and the subject, allows for deeper discussion about culture and cuisine than any other mode. Expository is also a strong mode; in that it allows the subject to connect directly to the audience.

In terms of my own documentaries, however, I believe my strongest is the Observational documentary, *Where the Food is Made*. I found that this format is the most feasible, especially for not having a budget, because it does not potentially require shutting down a kitchen in order to set up complicated shots. In an Observational documentary, capturing the subject as they are is the most important aspect of this mode, not the aesthetics- which made acquiring b-roll of the Payne's kitchen simple and efficient. Ensuring that I had footage of sequences was vital to creating a strong Observational documentary, which I believe turned out rather well.

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Appendix 1



Appendix 2

General Questions

- Why have you dedicated your life to the culinary pursuit?
- Why did you decide to open a restaurant?
- How has it affected your life?
- Are you the original owner?
 - Or how did you come to own?
- What does food mean to you?
- Why is food important to you?
- Was there a time in your life where you knew you wanted to be a restaurateur or chef/cook?
- How do you think food affects communities of people?
- Can you give an example of a time that you connected people with food?
- Do you think the quality of food affects the connections created by it?
- What is more important: the quality of the food or the people you are sharing it with?
- If you had to work in any other industry, what would it be?
- Do you think the media portrays food as more profound than it really is? If so, is that a bad thing?
- How do we inspire people to be in the culinary world? Is that important?

VERA MAE'S

Interview 1 (Chef)

1. Was there a time in your life when you knew you wanted to be a chef/cook?
2. Why Vera Mae's?
3. What do you love most about the work you do?
4. What does food mean to you?
5. How do you think food affects communities of people?
6. Do you think the quality of food affects the connections created by it?
7. What is more important: the quality of food or the people you are sharing it with?
8. Do you think the media (TV shows, movies, etc.) portrays food as something more profound than it really is? If so, is that a bad thing?
9. How do we inspire more people to take part in the culinary world? Why or why not is that important to do?

Interview 2 (Owner)

1. Why did you decide to open a restaurant?
2. What is your mission with Vera Mae's?
3. How has it affected your life?
4. How do you think food affects communities of people?
5. Do you think the quality of food affects the connections created by it?
6. What is more important: the quality of food or the people you are sharing it with?
7. Do you think the media (TV shows, movies, etc.) portrays food as something more profound than it really is? If so, is that a bad thing?
8. How do we inspire more people to take part in the culinary world? Why or why not is that important to do?

PAYNE'S RESTAURANT

Guiding Questions for Stephen

- Can you say your full name and spell it out?
- You're originally from Great Britain, correct? Where exactly?
- How did you end up in Gas City?
- The first time we met you had mentioned that you grew up in a family where food was very important, how has that affected your life?
- Did the community that you grew up in value food like your family did?
- Do you think the quality of the food affects the connections created by it?
 - Is the quality or the people you are sharing it with more important?
- Do you think that the media portrays food as more profound than it really is? If so, is that a bad thing?

Appendix 3



Appendix 4

Vera Mae's Bistro

9/21/19

Day 1 of 1

1

Producer	Garrett Looker	(574) 601-9563
Director	Ashley Mullen	(317) 775-0598
AP	Jacob Guenin	(317) 509-3149
Nearest Hospital	765.747.3111	
2401 W University .		
Muncie, IN 47303		



BREAKFAST	N/A	CRAFT SERVICES	
LUNCH	1:00 PM	Garrett Looker	(317) 601-9563 (317) 601-9563
SUNRISE	7:31 AM	SUNSET	7:43 PM
WEATHER	High 85°	Low 65°	
Humidity	59%	Partly Cloudy	udy

Please check individual call times.

CALL 11:00 AM
Filming Location:
 Vera Mae's Bistro
 207-209 S Walnut St, Muncie, IN 47305

305

Schedule	
11	Call time/load gear
11:45	Leave loading dock
12	@ Vera Maes
12-1:30	Interview 1 set-up
1:30-2:30	Interview 1 (Chef)
2:30-3:30	Interview 2 set-up/Lunch
3:30-4:30	Interview 2 (Owner)
4:30-6	B-roll/ tear down
6:30	Leave
6:45	Unload gear

Production Notes
Please dress somewhat business casual!
Please be as professional and respectful as possible.



POSITION	NAME	PHONE	IN	Location
Director	Ashley Mullen	317.775.0598	11:00 AM	Loading Dock
1st AD	Garret Looker	574.601.9563	11:00 AM	Loading Dock
Dir. of Photography/ DIT	Jacob Guenin	317.509.3149	11:00 AM	Loading Dock
Interviewer	Eddie Metzger	765.212.5660	1:00 PM	Vera Mae's
Cam OP	Nick Kampsen	224.239.6949	11:00 AM	Loading Dock
1st AC/Still Photographer	Elijah Gannaway	812.290.4760	11:00 AM	Loading Dock
2nd AC	Sammy Essex	317.496.2169	11:00 AM	Loading Dock
Gaffer	Amy Frye	317.459.8637	11:00 AM	Loading Dock
Grip	Scott Anderson	630.636.0241	11:00 AM	Loading Dock
Boom Op	Eric Heinzman	317.800.9578	11:00 AM	Loading Dock



Payne's

10/27/19

Day 1 of 1

Producer	Garrett Looker	(574) 601-9563
Director	Ashley Mullen	(317) 775-0598
AP	Jacob Guenin	(317) 509-3149
Nearest Hospital (765) 348-0300		
410 Pilgrim Blvd		
Hartford City, IN 47348		



BREAKFAST	N/A	CRAFT SERVICES
LUNCH	1:00 PM	Garrett Looker (317) 601-9563
SUNRISE		SUNSET 
8:03 AM		6:46 PM
WEATHER	High 62°	Low 43°
Humidity	59%	Cloudy

Please check individual call times.

CALL 7:00 AM

Filming Location:
Payne's
4925 S Kay Bee Dr, Gas City, IN 46933

Schedule	
7:00	Call time/load gear
7:15	Leave loading dock
7:45	@ Payne's
7:45-8:30	Interview set-up
8:30-9	Interview (Cook)
9-9:30	Gear move/set-up for B-Roll
9:30-12:30	Film B-roll/Observational Doc
12:30	Bounce
1	@ Loading Dock

Production Notes
Please dress somewhat business casual!
Please be as professional and respectful as possible.



POSITION	NAME	PHONE	IN	Location
Director	Ashley Mullen	317.775.0598	7:00 AM	Loading Dock
1st AD/PA	Garret Looker	574.601.9563	7:00 AM	Loading Dock
DP/Cam OP 1	Jacob Guenin	317.509.3149	7:00 AM	Loading Dock
Cam OP 2	Nick Kampsen	224.239.6949	7:00 AM	Loading Dock
Cam OP 3	Austin Webster	812.290.4760	7:00 AM	Loading Dock
Gaffer	Amy Frye	317.459.8637	7:00 AM	Loading Dock
Boom Op	Eric Heinzman	317.800.9578	7:00 AM	Loading Dock

Appendix 5



Image taken from *The Chef Show* (Choi, Favreau, & Johnson, 2018).